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## NJDOE News

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### **School Districts Report Across-the-board Decreases in Incidents of Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse**

#### [Violence, Vandalism And Substance Abuse In New Jersey Public Schools, 2001-2002](#)

School districts throughout New Jersey reported a decline in the incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse in New Jersey public schools for the 2001-02 school year. Commissioner of Education William L. Librera today publicly released the Department of Education's annual report on *Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey Public Schools*. In addition to containing statistics reported to the state by local school districts, the report details 30 state-level initiatives designed to promote safe schools for New Jersey's 1.3 million public school students.

"It is significant that local educators have reported an across-the-board decrease in all major reporting categories," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "It is particularly gratifying to report that two-thirds of our schools reported five or fewer incidents in 2001-02 and more than three schools in eight reported no incidents at all."

Commissioner Librera noted that the schools have special incentives to report all incidents of violence, vandalism and substance abuse in the public schools. The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires the states to develop systems of identifying persistently dangerous schools, and new state regulations to be adopted later this year set penalties for falsifying annual district violence and vandalism reports. He noted that 2001-02 was the third year in which educators used the state's Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS), and that the system helps to standardize the reporting categories and simplify the reporting process for educators.

"I hope we continue to show similar declines in future years," Dr. Librera said. "Schools have demonstrated their commitment to create safe learning environments for our students. Governor McGreevey and I will continue to work with appropriate state agencies and local educators to continue to find effective ways to keep our schools safe."

The total number of incidents reported by school districts in 2001-02 was 22,744, a nine percent decrease from incidents reported in 2000-01. Summary highlights in the major reporting categories are as follows:

- Violence, down 8 percent, primarily as the result of a 22 percent reduction in the number of threats and an 8 percent reduction in the number of fights reported;
- Vandalism, down 14 percent, producing the fewest number of incidents ever recorded
- Weapons, down 7 percent; and
- Substance abuse, down 6 percent, with moderate declines in the three sub-categories of use, possession and sale/distribution.

Complete category-by-category charts are included in the full report, which is available from the Department of Education's Web site: [www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education).

The Department of Education continues to assist school districts in meeting the requirements of state regulations governing school safety, violence and health services with more than 30 initiatives. Highlights of the state's programmatic response in the last year include:

**Establishment of the New Jersey Center for Character Education** Housed at the Center for Applied Psychology in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, Rutgers University, the center offers in-depth technical assistance and support in the forms of evaluation of school programs, professional development and skills enhancement. The center was established with a federal grant under the Partnerships in Character Education grant, program, part of the No Child Left Behind Act. Creation of the center and 10 demonstration sites (Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Woodbridge, Westwood Regional, Cape May County Special Services, Hunterdon Central Regional, Cherry Hill, Monroe Township and Highland Park) will result in model

programs that use effective strategies and scientifically based research to improve character education.

**Violence Awareness Week:** The Legislature last year passed a law designating the third week in October each year as *School Violence Awareness Week*. During this week, school districts must organize activities, such as age-appropriate forums on topics such as conflict resolution, student diversity and tolerance. The Department of Education is helping to lead the effort by providing guidelines and information to school districts for use in planning local observance of the week.

**Children We Share: Partners in Student Discipline and Development:** In a collaborative effort with the College of New Jersey and with support provided from the New Jersey Principals & Supervisors Association, this project aims to stimulate parent and community involvement with school-based activities to promote safe schools. A key component of this project was development of a guidebook, videotape program and a video disc that provides information that local schools can share with parents in promoting positive youth development. In addition, a principals institute was established to promote use of the materials developed.

**Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Exemplary Programs Showcase:** In May, 2003, the Department of Education sponsored a statewide conference for developers of programs for safe schools that have been designated as exemplary by the United States Department of Education. Representatives from local schools throughout the state were able to attend the conference at no charge to see presentations made by the providers of the exemplary programs. The conference was videotaped and the videotape will be circulated to school districts statewide.

Accurate reporting of data under the EVVRS is vitally important, said Isaac Bryant, assistant commissioner for the department's Division of Student Support Services, who encouraged local districts to review their reports to determine effective grassroots strategies for response.

"Just as the state uses data reported to improve programs and trainings to promote safe schools, so too can local districts review their reports to determine an effective response to meet their needs," Bryant said, indicating that using the EVVRS is more than a function the districts perform for the state. "The Department of Education can provide local school districts with specific data reports at their request within 24 hours."

Data reported on the EVVRS will be used by the Department of Education to determine which schools meet the criteria for a persistently dangerous school under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The state intends to use incidents reported by school districts in fiscal years 2000, 2001 and 2002 to determine which schools meet the criteria of persistently dangerous schools.

Data are still under review and no designations for individual schools can be determined until a policy now under development and a review of the data are complete. School districts and charter schools will receive notices of their designations by July 1, 2003.